

A Review of
Rev. George Jackson's
Lecture on the
Early Narratives of
Genesis

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on the Early Narratives of Genesis**

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By the early narratives, Mr. Jackson means the first eleven chapters of Genesis. The lecture was delivered before the Young Men's Christian Association, Toronto, in February, 1909, and was published in full a few weeks later. His style is excellent, and the manner in which the dagger-point of some unpalatable assertion is padded—requiring more than one reading—exhibits fine literary skill. The substance of the lecture, however, concerns us more particularly at present—of which we propose to take a comprehensive survey.

In first considering matters of a more general nature we notice that Mr. Jackson speaks with scant respect of the genealogy contained in these early chapters, raises doubt of its truthfulness, and declares it is "extremely difficult to take such statements seriously." While tradition, in common with other nations, was held by the Hebrews, Mr. Jackson says their particular tradition on this subject, "outsoared

BS 1235

.3

R67

1909

XXX

all their cotemporaries"; in other words, it eclipsed all others in exaggerated story-telling.

Yet the learned Delitzsch had no difficulty in accepting the record, and propounded an explanation, not of the narrative, but how men at the time referred to could live to so great an age. Even the skeptic Buffon (no mean scientist of his time), admitted the truth of the record, and assigned physical causes for such long life.

Mr. Gladstone and Genesis.

And what shall we say of Mr. Gladstone and his "Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture"! Mr. Jackson ventures to predict that this world never again will witness a duel with such "rusty weapons" as Gladstone, in his "defenceless position," employed in controversy with Huxley. In this connection it is worth noting that one of the great geologists of the world was Prof. Dana. Huxley said: "There is no one to whose authority on geological questions I am more readily disposed to bow than that of my eminent friend, Prof. Dana." But Dana said, "I agree in all essential points with Mr. Gladstone, and believe that the first chapter of Genesis and science are in accord."

The late Dr. McCaul, Professor of Hebrew in King's College, said, "Moses describes the process of creation as gradual, and mentions the order in which living things appeared—plants, fishes, fowls, land animals, man. By the study of nature geology had arrived independently at the same conclusion. Whence did Moses get all this knowledge? How was it that he worded his rapid sketch with such scientific accuracy?" (Aids to Faith, p. 233.)

Sir William Dawson on Genesis and Geology.

The late Sir William Dawson, President of McGill University, the discoverer of the simplest and most primitive life found in the rocks, and who must rank, at least, the equal of Mr. Jackson in the department of geology says: "The first, and a very startling conclusion that we reach here is that the fifth and sixth days of the Mosaic record (the account of the creation of the creatures inhabiting the sea, air and earth, and the creatures inhabiting the sea, air and earth, and finally man) cover nearly the whole of geological time. Of the earlier creative aeons geological science knows nothing except by inference. . . . On the whole we may be satisfied that Scripture in its detail, as to the origin of animals, contradicts no received result of science, and anticipates many of its discoveries. . . . The progress in animal life thus shortly sketched is sufficient to show the remarkable manner in which revelation has foreshadowed what, in these last days, the rocks have opened their mouths to tell." (The Bible and Science.)

After the above statements (and no discoveries made since to alter or modify them) how sublime the confidence of Mr. Jackson who says "When . . . we go on to claim that the secrets which the mind of man is slowly spelling out from the rocks . . . were revealed to the writers of Genesis years ago, science simply laughs us to scorn." However, to give Mr. Jackson due credit, he, amidst the many myths found in the ancient world "readily concedes" that the Bible myth "approaches nearest to the conclusions of science." Wonderful guess for a myth!

Questions of Chronology.

But Mr. Jackson reserves his heaviest sigh for that eminent scientist, Philip H. Gosse, who, he says, betrayed his geological trust when he dared to "hazard the suggestion that when six thousand years ago the world came from the Creator's hands the fossils lay ready made in the strata of the rocks." So great is Mr. Jackson's distress, he declares that Mr. Gosse's suggestion "is a sight to move one to tears." On the other hand Mr. Jackson asserts that man's first appearance on earth occurred "tens of thousands of years ago," though the oldest date with which he favors us is 4500 B.C.

He says re the alleged confusion of tongues at Babel instead of only one language existing before that time Dr. Driver states that inscriptions have been found which show three distinct languages. From this one would infer that the Bible had committed itself to a definite date for this event, which is incorrect. The question here is what is the real date at which the confusion of tongues occurred. No one claims Usher's chronology to be inspired.

What is a Myth?

Mr. Jackson claims that the early narratives of Genesis are myth. In all controversies definitions are highly important, and this statement raises the question, What is a myth? The Standard Dictionary defines the word as follows: "A fictitious or conjectural narrative presented as historical, but without any basis of fact." The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge says: "The myth starts from an

idea, and invents facts to embody and represent it." Again, speaking of Strauss, it says: "He resolves all the supernatural and miraculous elements of Christ's person and history into myths or imaginative representations of religious ideas." (Art. Mythical Theory.) The Encyclopaedia Britannica speaks of "the senseless stories or myths about the gods," and, again speaking of the nations which had been puzzled by their gods being represented in the form of beasts it says "the Egyptians invented an explanation—itsself a myth." (Art. Mythology.) Froude, speaking of successive periods in human history, says: "In the first or mythological there is no historical groundwork at all." (Short Studies: Scientific Method Applied to History.) Mr. Jackson, in his second lecture, quotes, with approval, Dr. Driver in the following sentence: "The mythology of Greece is indeed a wonderful creation of the human mind." Mr. Jackson himself uses the word with this meaning, which is shown (1) negatively: he carefully avoids throughout his whole lecture employing any word which could possibly be constructed to imply that he believed the record to be one of fact, and (2) positively: he explicitly declares "these chapters have no value as . . . history." As between a record of fact or fancy he chooses the latter.

From the above authorities and quotations we learn that myth is a story presented in historical form—an invention of the human mind, without any foundation in fact.

In a subsequent lecture Mr. Jackson again refers to the use of the word myth, claiming that he was misunderstood. Though frequently using this word he

fails to favor us with its definition. His nearest approach is to make indirect reference to myths as the "primitive ideas of primitive men." If the early narratives of Genesis then are only the "ideas" of men he thereby implicitly denies that they are a Divine revelation of facts. Finding several myths floating about in the limited intellectual world of the ancients on the subject of the creation of the world, the creation of man, the fall of man, the deluge, etc., the myth which happened to be current among the Hebrews was selected by God, not to teach the facts of the alleged events (for it contained no such record) but to teach certain religious lessons which Mr. Jackson alleges may be deduced from these myths. Why God espoused the Hebrew myth, while rejecting others, is not stated, though the impression is left that thereby He used good discrimination. We dwell thus at length on this phase of the discussion so that there may be no confusion as to what Mr. Jackson really means to teach.

The myth theory is the crux of this controversy; and of all possible explanations of these early chapters the mythical interpretation is the most degrading to the general tenor of Scripture. Dr. Driver (whom Mr. Jackson evidently admires) is one of the most advanced critics of England. Referring to the patriarchal record he thinks there are "reasonable grounds for concluding that the narratives are in substance historical." (Quoted by Dr. Orr in Prob. of Old Test., p. 59.) Mr. Jackson, fails, however, to leave us even this small crumb of comfort.

He says: "To some minds, however, it will seem a thing incredible that God should make use of myths

in making known his will to mankind." This is true. On this point one sympathizes profoundly with Goldwin Smith, who holds that "inspiration can have no concord with myths—that when you admit the one you rule out the other." It seems abhorrent to the reverent Christian mind to base religious instruction on alleged events which never occurred. Such a conception is lowering to a proper respect for God. Of course when lessons are taught by means of parables, or the like, plainly stated or implied, no one thereby can possibly be misled.

The Call for a New Crusade.

Mr. Jackson says: "It is hardly less than cruel to allow young men and women to grow up in the belief that those chapters are literal history, and afterwards to send them to a university." There may be here a play on the word "literal," but in other parts Mr. Jackson makes it plain that he denies the records to be historical in any form—that is, a representation of facts. He also says: "There are multitudes who have felt themselves driven silently and sadly to surrender the faith of their fathers because that faith has always been presented to them bound up with doctrine concerning man and the universe which they now know to be false."

Beliefs about the alleged facts of the murder of Abel, the translation of Enoch, the confusion of tongues or the preservation of Noah are not doctrines. The alleged facts upon which doctrines "concerning man and the universe" are usually based are that God created the heaven and earth and man, that man was tempted and fell into sin, and that thereby mankind

has inherited tendencies to evil. Are these fundamental doctrines the ones which young men, on attending college will find to be false? If not, what are the Biblical doctrines "concerning man and the universe" which "multitudes have been driven silently and sadly to surrender"?

Mr. Jackson refrains from counselling ministers to uproot these mischevous beliefs in preaching from the pulpit. One is curious to know the reason why. But as the evils must be eradicated "somehow" he practically calls upon all Christian parents and Bible class teachers not to allow young people to grow up in the belief of the historicity of the first chapters of Genesis and of those doctrines which logically flow therefrom. If these parties would only do so they would greatly oblige the professors by saving precious time in uprooting falsehood and preventing a violent wrench to their sons' religious beliefs in the future.

So far as the Sunday Schools are concerned it is too late for those boys who will be at college, say, within five years, for only two years ago nearly all the Sunday School scholars of the world studied these very chapters. The helps for the teachers, such as the Sunday School Times, Peloubet's Notes, the Sunday School Banner, and, so far as I know, all other teachers' helps taught the historicity of these chapters. And these publications presented the ripest teachings of the leading religious writers of two continents. According to Mr. Jackson it was "hardly less than cruel" to do so, but as the deed is done it must place a painful duty on college professors a few years hence.

Again, if Sunday School teachers would teach the myth theory they would, Mr. Jackson assures us,

"make impossible some, at least, of the manifold tragedies of young people." At the same time he warns us there are "perils with which such a task is beset." Why should there be "perils" if the teaching is true, particularly when the myth story was, by some, specially invented, and is specially intended to avert spiritual "tragedy"? Why should not the theory early be taught, peril or not peril, when it is imperative "somehow" to make it "plain that these chapters are not science, and are not history"?

When History Begins.

Mr. Jackson would begin the Bible, as history, at Genesis, Chap. XII.—the call of Abraham. At last we are on solid ground. He rejects the first eleven chapters as historic because his "common sense" will not allow him to believe certain stories recorded therein. But Aaron's rod turned into a serpent and swallowing up the others, the passage of the Red Sea, Balaam's ass speaking, the dividing of the Jordan, the fall of Jericho, the feeding of Elijah by ravens, the raising of the Shunammite's son, the destruction of Sennacherib's army, Daniel in the lion's den and the story of Jonah are all as hard of reception as anything to be found in the early chapters of Genesis—and they all occurred in historic time. He who can accept the above instances—all subsequent to Abraham, should have little difficulty with a serpent speaking, God walking in the cool of the day, the confusion of tongues, the generation of a race of giants, or the longevity of the patriarchs.

Logical Inconsistencies.

Mr. Jackson says man was "formed of the dust of the earth," also that he was "made in the likeness and the image of God." How does he know? Whence did he obtain this information? In all the world there is only one possible source—the early chapters of Genesis, but these are myth! One is surprised that Mr. Jackson, especially, should assert as a fact anything derived from a source so unreliable.

He declares "our need of redemption does not depend upon what Adam was, but upon what man is, and, so far as we have knowledge of him, always has been." It would be interesting here for Mr. Jackson to inform us what man "always has been," because, of course, what he "always has been" that he is now. Has he been always innocent? No, for Mr. Jackson admits he has fallen. "By the story of the fall," he says, "we learn how by sin man is deceived, and God's fair handiwork marred." Has he always been sinful? If so, how could there be a fall, which implies a previous state of innocence? Mr. Jackson is welcome to either horn of the dilemma.

He flouts the argument of Paul based upon "his reading of the narrative of Genesis" respecting the "reality of Adam and Eve and their doings in the garden," which, he says, is the foundation fact of the Pauline theology. As Paul is astray in his "foundation fact," and therefore in his argument based thereupon, what respect can Mr. Jackson or any one else have for Paul's other theological arguments? And in that case what becomes of a large part of the New Testament?

Mr. Jackson speaks of the "sublime chapter with which our Bible opens." But let no one suppose he means that it is sublime because it is a Divine revelation, for that chapter is simply the sublime invention of some literary genius, whose name, unfortunately, he withholds. After analyzing the first chapter, "a narrative," he says, "modelled on a plan," he further says this "literary symmetry, so complete and beautiful" could not be "merely accidental." "It is obviously," he says, "a part of the author's design." In other words, this "sublime first chapter" instead of being a revelation from God is only the clever invention of some literary artist.

Past Value of These Early Records.

Mr. Jackson admits "as a simple matter of fact," that "multitudes in all ages have set their seal that these old-world stories have put them into the possession of truths concerning God to the power and reality of which all experience bears witness." This must refer to the past, for he is now calling upon Sunday School teachers to inaugurate a campaign of mythical interpretation. This power, so well described, has come to millions who have long believed these "old-world stories" to be historic. How will teaching them to be myths improve the past glorious experiences of these "multitudes in all ages"? "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

Mr. Jackson further says the subject of Genesis is "not the creation, but the Creator." The record says "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth; let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven; let

the waters bring forth abundantly; let us make man." To any open-minded reader it is as much the story of the creation as of the Creator, but such a distinction suits Mr. Jackson's theory better, which is, that the story of the creation is fanciful and unreliable.

Comparing other ancient traditions with those of early Genesis, and mentioning the immense superiority of the latter, he says "the chaff of hurtful error has been winnowed away, and there remains only the wholesome grain of Divine truth." With the "hurtful error (of other traditions) winnowed away" and "only wholesome grain of Divine truth" preserved why degrade and discount such a marvellous record by styling it myth?

Will the Myth Theory Christianize Infidels?

Mr. Jackson states that it is a "significant fact that neither Charles Bradlaugh in England nor Colonel Ingersoll in America has had any successor. Again it is safe to predict they never will. And why? Because our changed methods of interpretation have robbed them of their miserable wares which formed their whole stock in trade." But why should a Bradlaugh or an Ingersoll waste his time preaching the early chapters of Genesis to be myth, sneering at the story of the temptation, cavilling at the record of the long lives, denying the confusion of tongues, and throwing doubt upon, if not making denial of, the deluge, when ministers of Christian churches, on account of their official position are doing the same work more effectively? The application of the same principle of interpretation carried far enough would make

the Bible utterly unworthy of regard by intelligent men. Or does the assumed conversion of one infidel overbalance the assured unsettling of ninety-nine Christians?

According to Mr. Jackson both history and science have passed the final word against the early chapters of Genesis being a record of fact. So all who wish to be considered abreast of the times are expected to fall down and worship this dictum.

At the same time how deeply will simple-minded Christians deplore the fact that Christ and his apostles were so unenlightened on certain subjects respecting which they undertook to speak and write. Assuming for the sake of argument the myth theory to be correct what a profound pang must be produced in the breast of plain Christians when they discover, for the first time, the authority of Christ and his apostles degraded. O had our religious leaders only been acquainted with the oracular utterances of Germany how much better confidence could we have placed in their teachings! And how we would have been saved the humiliation of having to shed our "theological prepossessions" received so largely from their sayings and writings!

The Authority of Christ.

According to Mr. Jackson these early chapters "contain no account of the real beginnings, either of the earth itself or of man and human civilization upon it." Among these "real beginnings" must be counted the creation of the first man. As men and women now exist there must have been a first man and

woman sometime, somewhere. This, at least, is no myth legend or allegory, but fact. It can only be therefore that the story is wrong. How much more confidence, then, should we have had in the authority of Christ had he refrained from exposing his want of knowledge in the following question wherein he implies his belief in the truthfulness of the Genesis narrative: "Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh"? As Sir William Dawson well says: "It is easy for shallow men . . . to say that they can reject Moses without rejecting Christ, but common sense cannot be deceived in this way."

Paul, too, unfortunately, not having access to Dr. Driver's "sober summary," so much superior in Mr. Jackson's opinion to those early chapters, blundered into saying: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." Again, Paul constructed an argument on the "reality of Adam and Eve and their doings in the garden," and enunciated "doctrines concerning man and the universe" based on the statements of Genesis. But what odds, since these are specifically mentioned by Mr. Jackson as the things which a young man later on will "know to be false"?

The Authority of the Apostles.

As these early narratives are neither "science nor history," and this "somehow" Mr. Jackson says "had to be made plain" it is saddening to find the apostle

John referring to a certain mythical Cain who slew a mythical brother, and to discover the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews speaking of the faith of this same mythical personage which prompted him to make a more excellent sacrifice than his brother; and further, referring to a certain "blood of sprinkling speaking better things than that of Abel" just as if a real person. Christ too evidently stumbled when he referred to the "blood of righteous Abel" as if he believed in his existence and in his murder.

It is also discouraging to find the apostle Jude and the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews referring to the preaching and translation of a mythical personage whom they both call Enoch. Tear from the New Testament the many references to the historicity of these early chapters and what a ragged remnant remains! Mr. Jackson speaks with solicitude of those "upon whose faith these early chapters of Genesis lay a burden that can scarcely be borne." But this insupportable load evidently did not distress Christ, Peter, Paul, Jude or John.

The Deluge.

When we come to Mr. Jackson's treatment of the deluge we find a curious jumble. The "narrative as it stands" he says "is plainly unhistoric" and "belongs to the world of legend rather than of history." Then he admits that the story of a "terrible local cataclysm that once overtook the original seat of the Semitic race . . . is probably true." This then makes a partial flood probably historical. As, however, it was only a "local cataclysm" it was prob-

ably a sort of Johnstown disaster on a larger scale. As it occurred only at the "seat of the Semitic race" he implies that other nations had been left untouched. Though his language throughout the paragraph is somewhat obscure he seems to admit that some kind of a flood spread from Babylonia to Egypt, though he fails to reveal the source of his information. He doubts, however, whether it reached Egypt; but for this opinion he advances no reason whatever. Yet he instils the poison of doubt (which implies a denial of the story) by asking the following question: "If . . . Egypt was not overtaken by the disaster, what becomes of the plain statement of the Biblical writers that all mankind save Noah and his family were for their wickedness swept from all the face of the earth?"

Had Peter known of this doubt or denial instituted in the name of so-called science would he have written, "When once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water"? The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews was likewise in sad ignorance for he says, "By faith Noah being warned of God of these things not seen as yet, moved with fear prepared an ark to the saving of his house." He proceeds to state the spiritual effect—"By the which he condemned the world." But as there was no flood, except perhaps a "local cataclysm at the seat of the Semitic race," of course there could be no testimony given against the general wickedness of the world, notwithstanding the writer's distinct statement quoted above.

Christ's Testimony Disparaged.

But to make matters worse, Christ assumes, yea, asserts the historicity of the flood. He said, "As it was in the days of Noah so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." Would Christ have made such a palpable mistake had he under his eye at the time the following oracular deliverance: "The narrative as it stands is plainly unhistoric, and belongs to the world of legend rather than of history"?

"Sin—and this," says Mr. Jackson, "is the story of the flood—when it is full-grown bringeth forth death." But as the story itself is so utterly unreliable what more Divine authority is there behind it than that of Æsop's fables, which also convey several useful lessons?

Mr. Jackson indirectly reproves Paul for building a theological argument on the story of Adam's fall, but what does he do with Christ's assertion of the flood as a fact, and sufficiently extensive to overwhelm the whole human race save one family? He completely ignores it. With Mr. Jackson does Christ's positive declaration on such a subject count as no factor whatever in the interpretation of Scripture? Does he consider Christ's assertion not worth answering, or is he unable to answer it? If Christ is the ever-existent and everlasting God we believe Him to be, He was, and is in a position to know whether such a great event occurred or not; and to think of Him asserting as a fact an event which he knew never happened is inconceivable.

Reading the Genesis Story in Some Other Book.

Mr. Jackson says: "If . . . we read in any other book that a serpent talked with a woman in a garden; that in the same garden God himself walked in the cool of the day; that the sons of God took unto them wives of the daughters of men, and as a result the earth was peopled with a race of giants; if, I say, we read things like these in any other book, we should never dream of taking them as the sober record of actual facts. We should say, at once, This is not history; this is myth, legend, allegory."

Now let Mr. Jackson extend this same principle into the New Testament, for example, as follows: "If we read in any other book that a son was born to a virgin; that this same person, in later years, turned water into wine; walked securely on a boisterous sea; raised a young girl and two young men from the dead; raised himself from the dead; and that his followers raised to life a needle-woman and a young man killed in falling from a third-story window. If, I say, we read things like these in any other book, we should never dream of taking them as the sober record of actual facts. We should say at once, This is not history; this is myth, legend, allegory."

Now if one can accept the supernatural in the New Testament (as we presume Mr. Jackson does) on what principle can the supernatural in the Old be rejected? If one expunges the supernatural from the Bible, and all the truths and arguments deduced therefrom, how much of the Bible will be left? Christ himself based an argument on his miracles: "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did they had not had sin." If the Biblical record of the super-

natural is false how can we be sure of the truth of the balance? Mr. Jackson's method of interpretation throws the whole Bible into the seething caldron of confusion and doubt.

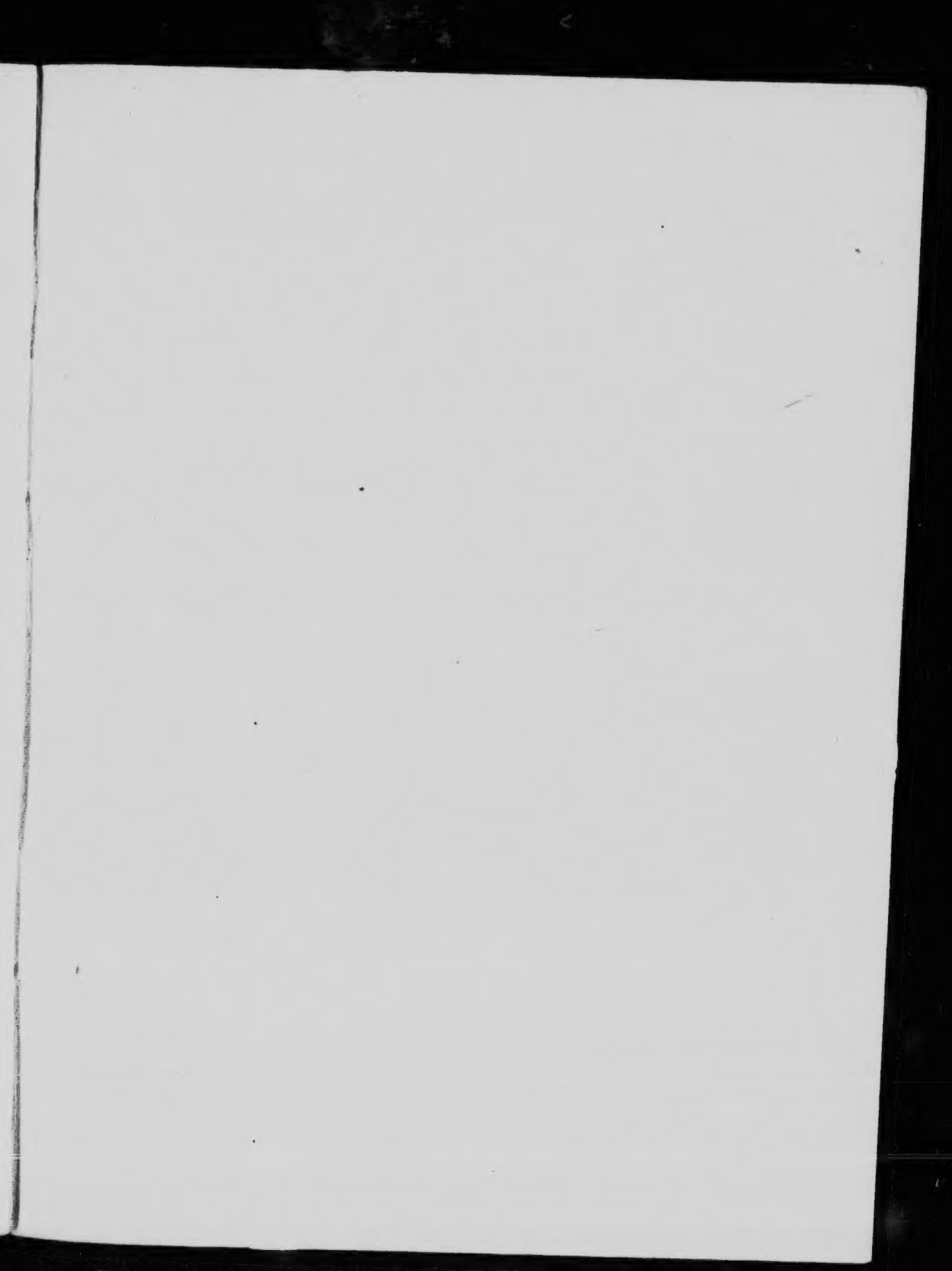
What Difference Whether Myth or Fact?

When someone objects, "Why should we longer load our Bible with this antiquarian lumber?" Mr. Jackson says if that were all "we may be quite sure they would not be in our Bible to trouble us to-day; the common sense of mankind would have made short work of them centuries ago." "The answer in one word," he says, "is their supreme religious worth."

In reply let us offer two quotations. The first is from Dr. Orr's able work, *The Problem of the Old Testament*, lately published: "Revelation is historical, and it is a serious disservice to religion to depreciate the historical element in revelation, or to represent it as immaterial to faith whether the history in the Old Testament is true or legendary. . . . But if the ground is taken from the only facts we have what remains to yield the revelation? . . . It is again a mistake to represent it as a matter of indifference, for the right understanding of revelation, what theory we adopt of its origins and course of development. What does it matter how the thing came to be, it is said, if we have the result? But in everything else it is recognized that a thing is only known when its real history is known. No scientist would ever allow that one account of origins is as good as another." (p. 485.)

The second is an illustration from Dr. Peloubet. "The history of Washington and his hatchet teaches the virtue of truthfulness whether it be fiction or fact. But tell the boy that the story is generally believed to be mythical, and the inspiring power is very small compared to what it would be, could the whole greatness and heroism of Washington stand behind the story as a fact. . . . Show that the Old Testament stories are myths and legends, and you have dimmed the value and power of the roll-call of heroes and heroic deeds in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews." (Notes, 1907, p. 16.)

Whatever special counterpoise certain exceptional persons holding the views discussed above may possess so as to preserve their faith and steady their lives, the natural effect of such teachings with the ordinary man in the long run would be stealthily to unsettle his faith, produce disrelish for and consequent disregard of the word of God, engender want of confidence in the authority of Christ and his apostles, arouse doubt, if not denial of the inspiration of the sacred writers, cause neglect of public worship, cut the nerve of evangelistic effort, and, in short, promote a general lowering of the religious life of the people.





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